

IDEAS

The Conspiracy Complex

A quarter of a century after JFK's assassination, some investigators still reject the official account. Here in outline are several of the conspiracy theories:



A Mafia Capo In Dixie Did It

By John H. Davis

THERE WAS no more desperately threatened enemy of the Kennedys in the fall of 1963 than Carlos Marcello, the Mafia boss of the Gulf Coast.

For, in the fall of 1963, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, with the full backing of his brother, was bent on destroying Marcello's power once and for all. The Justice Department's conspiracy and perjury case against Carlos and his brother Joe, due to go to trial that November, was

to be the first step in removing Carlos from the country forever. Carlos Marcello's possible motive, then, in killing the president, would have gone far beyond revenge, to survival.

Everything he had built up over the years, as well as his very presence in the United States, was under direct attack from the Kennedys at the very moment President John F. Kennedy was venturing into Marcello territory.

The sheer volume and extent of the body of circumstantial evidence suggesting the possible involvement of the Mar-

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The Mafia Wanted No Probe

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cello organization in the assassination that has accumulated over the past 25 years is now sufficiently persuasive to require evaluation and action on the part of the government.

To imply, as the Justice Department has done by its inaction, that this body of evidence is meaningless requires us to brand at least 18 witnesses and informants as either liars or lunatics, or both, and requires us, as well, to regard the extraordinarily large number of relationships shared by Lee Harvey Oswald (the president's killer), Jack Ruby (Oswald's killer) and David Ferrie (a friend of Oswald) with associates of Carlos Marcello as mere coincidence.

To be able to get away with the assassination, Carlos would have had to anticipate the responses of the Dallas police, the FBI, the Central Intelligence Agency, whatever special investigative body President Lyndon Johnson might choose to appoint and a possible investigative effort, independent of the FBI, by Attorney General Kennedy.

THE LOUISIANA Mafia had an entente with the Dallas Police Department dating back to the 1940s when the Chicago outfit attempted to take over Dallas using young Jack Ruby as one of its tools. As for the FBI, it has become more and more apparent that Carlos must have exerted some control over the FBI field office in New Orleans in the early '60s. There is no other convincing explanation of why the New Orleans agents assigned to oversee Marcello failed so completely to carry out Attorney General Kennedy's order to upgrade their

investigation of Carlos Marcello, including the deployment of electronic surveillance against him.

As for the CIA, we know that Marcello admitted to having participated in the CIA-Mafia plots to assassinate Cuban leader Fidel Castro and was close to at least one of the plotters, Santo Trafficante. The agency would never undertake a thorough investigation of the assassination if the leading suspects in the crime were knowledgeable of the CIA-Mafia plots against Castro, for fear of having its darkest secret revealed in the process.

We come to President Johnson and whatever body he might have appointed to investigate the assassination. Did Carlos have enough on Johnson so that the new president would not wish an investigation to turn up evidence of Carlos' complicity? Of course he did. Carlos Marcello's payoff man in Texas in the '50s, the notorious Jack Halfen, had been a principal financial backer of Lyndon Johnson's political campaigns in Texas from the late '40s on, to the extent that it could be said that illegal profits from Marcello's slot machines in Dallas and Houston and from bookmakers' subscriptions to his racing wire service throughout all of Texas, used by Halfen to finance Johnson, were crucial to the success of Johnson's senatorial campaigns. How would it look if it came out in the press that the man accused of masterminding the assassination of Kennedy had been an important backer of the man who had profited most from the assassination?

There remained the question of Attorney General Kennedy's response to the assassination of his brother. According to Edward Becker, a private investigator from Las Vegas, Marcello had stated in September, 1961, that he believed the assassination of President Kennedy would destroy his younger brother's power, so that he would not be capable of galvanizing the Justice Department into launching a thorough investigation of the crime. Events proved Marcello's alleged prediction was absolutely valid. After the assassination, both Johnson and FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover turned their backs on

Robert Kennedy and rendered him virtually powerless as attorney general.

In fact, we can now affirm with reasonable certainty that upon the 25th anniversary of the assassination, no other conspiracy scenario seems even remotely as plausible as that suggesting the complicity of the Marcellos.

The four individuals actually arrested by the police in connection with the assassination of the president and the murder of his suspected assassin were all connected either to Carlos Marcello or to one or more of his close associates.

IN CONFRONTING the possibility of the involvement of Carlos Marcello in the crime of the century, 25 years after Hoover deliberately avoided the issue, the question inevitably arises: Would a powerful Mafia leader in his right mind have ever chosen such an unpromising crew to accomplish a major execution as that ragtag bunch of ne'er-do-well misfits, Lee Harvey Oswald, David Ferrie and Jack Ruby?

It was precisely their apparent unsuitability and removal from the stereotype of the professional Mafia hitman that would have persuaded a Mafia leader to utilize Oswald, Ferrie and Ruby in an important execution. As Carlos Marcello had "clearly indicated" to Edward Becker, "his own lieutenants must not be identified as the assassins" so "that there would thus be a necessity to have them use or manipulate someone else to carry out the actual crime." An ex-defector to the Soviet Union who passes out pro-Castro leaflets in the streets, a hairless ex-airline pilot with a history of arrests for committing "indecent acts" with young boys, and a small-time striptease joint operator — what a crew! Who would ever dream of linking these amateurs, these nonentities, to professional criminals, to the Mafia? The selection of such an apparently unprofessional assassin as Oswald, or the framing of such a type in a murder plot, was another time-honored tradition of the Mafia.



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Illustration by Gary Viskupic